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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000281

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/29/2018

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: OPPOSITION MEDIA ADVISOR ABDUCTED, THEN
RELEASED

REF: COLOMBO 218

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

11. (U) At approximately 19:30 local time on March 11, Professor Dhammika Ganganath Dissanayake, the former Chairman of the State Broadcasting Corporation, was abducted by men in civilian clothes who came in a white van. Early in the morning of March 12 Dissanayake was released unharmed more than 20 km from his home. Dissanayake is currently a Media Lecturer at Sri Jayawardenepura University in Colombo and a media advisor to UNP Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe.

12. (C) Ambassador spoke with Wickremesinghe early in the morning of March 12. The Opposition Leader reported that two uniformed policeman had come to the professor's house the afternoon of March 11 to ask some questions. During the abduction that evening, a houseboy at the professor's residence recognized one of the abductors, who was in civilian clothes, as one of the policemen who had visited earlier in the day. Wickremesinghe reported that Dissanayake, who has intermittently advised the UNP on media issues, is working on a book about abductions. The abductors, according to the UNP leader, asked for a draft of the book which Dissanayake did not have. (Note: According to an article in a state-owned newspaper dated February 27, the book was believed to be sharply critical of President Rajapaksa and his younger brother, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa. Dissanayake travels frequently to Australia for medical treatment, and most likely keeps the draft there.)

13. (C) COMMENT: The houseboy's claim that at least one of the policemen who questioned Dissanayake participated in the abduction is plausible. The topic of Dissanayake's book is the almost certainly the cause of the heightened police interest in the professor. Unlike Sudar Oli editor Vidyatharan, (ref A), who is still in detention and whose abduction/arrest raised questions about likely government complicity in the large number of "disappearances" in the country, Dissanayake was released quickly. His Sinhalese ethnicity and his strong connections to the main opposition UNP probably ensured his quick release and relatively good treatment during the incident.

BLAKE